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N. Škrbić Alempijević, R. Mesarić Žabčić: Croatian Coastal Festivals and the Construction of the...

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## CROATIAN COASTAL FESTIVALS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MEDITERRANEAN<sup>1</sup>

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*The focus of this paper is on festivals viewed as arenas in which cultural identities are built and reasserted. References to tradition and the past play a mayor role in this process. The authors analyze four thematically different festivals taking place along the Croatian Adriatic coast: the Festival of Dalmatian "Klapa" Singers in Omiš, the Rab Fiesta, the Dubrovnik Summer Festival and the Split Summer Festival. They are approached as ways of rediscovering and constructing Mediterranean imagery on stage.*

**Key words:** *Mediterranean, festivals, Festival of Dalmatian "Klapa" Singers in Omiš, Rab Fiesta, Dubrovnik Summer Festival, Split Summer Festival*

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## INTRODUCTION

"If we imagine the sunset on the horizon, a stone cove reflecting the purple of the sky and the deep blue of the calm sea, the so called 'bonaca', the ship and the smoke coming from 'gradela's (a type of grid-iron) it seems that we are faced with the most beautiful scene we could ever imagine. But the magic is not complete yet, not until the chirping of crickets and the singing of 'klapa' unite to create a paradise that has no match in the world. (...) Today, everyone can enjoy the beauty of 'klapa' singing provided that he comes to Omiš during the Festival..."(sic).<sup>2</sup>

This is how a tourism web page invites visitors to take part in a summer festival focusing on *klapa*: groups of male singers performing a form of *a cappella* singing described as a symbol of the Dalmatian coastal region of Croatia. The festival is described as a way of experiencing the Mediterranean, as an ingredient without which a visitor cannot fully gain an idyllic impression of the Croatian coast. The festival serves as an arena in which the tradition of rethinking and reinventing the "Mare Internum" is perpetuated. The history of the intellectual construction of this "imaginary sea", voiced through the expressions of travel writers, artists, but also scientists, is long indeed. Some apparently obvious ingredients of the Mediterranean, varying from imagery of the European "Other" sealed by physical frontiers, to the "Cradle of Western Civilization", are better regarded as representations of various strands of research and popular thought (Horden and Purcell 2000:26-27). The only category featured in these discourses as more exotic than the Mediterranean of today is the Mediterranean of the past. This idea is echoed in advertising by the Croatian National Tourist Board: "Croatia – the Mediterranean as it once was" is a slogan that has presented the country at tourist fairs worldwide from 2002 on. A representative of the Croatian National Tourist Office in London sees this new marketing orientation as a reason for Croatia's growth in popularity among tourists:

"Over past 10 years Croatia has been rebuilding its infrastructure on very healthy foundations and image along the lines of destination's

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fdk.hr/indexeng.html>, accessed 19.02.2010.

slogan 'Croatia – Mediterranean as it once was', quality rather than volume, eco clean environment, preserved balance of local slow pace of life and volume of tourists, non-commercialised and not overbuilt coast and islands, charming old towns and villages, history, culture all blended in prefect harmony" (*sic*, Lozić 2005).

Many festivals along the Croatian coast are resonant with that thought. Such is also the case with the festival in Omiš. By placing the origins of this "original cultural heritage" in the distant past, the organizers turn the contemporary stage into a context where "the Mediterranean as it once was" comes to life for participants. The festival scene is presented as a space where the sounds of the sea and images transposed from the past create an oasis in which visitors can rest for a while from their everyday worries.

Viewing the potential of the coastal landscape and reenactments of the past as a commodity is not a new perspective. Still, it is a very relevant one. Studying festivals as forms of an experience economy enables analysts to estimate the contribution of festivals to overall social development, as a means of "remaking worlds" (Picard and Robinson 2006). Due to the upsurge in event tourism, intensifying gradually from the 1960s on and gaining huge momentum in the last two decades, festivals have frequently been analyzed as marketing tools, with the emphasis on their impact in generating publicity, extending stays and travelling itineraries (Cope 2005:1). This article provides some data on the attraction base that modern Croatian festivals offer in the development of cultural tourism. However, the festivals' economic value is not our main concern. Here, we primarily approach festivals by addressing the dimension of self-presentation. We raise the questions: for what purposes, apart from economic, do communities in which festivals take place need them, and what meanings do different actors, related to these events in diverse ways, attach to them? We discuss what kind of heritage these festivals claim and produce, and especially the role that festivals play within the community. In this way, we highlight the symbolic value of festivals.

Since we approach festivals as cultural spaces, we necessarily need to discuss the issue of what kind of "culture" is presented on stage. In this context, "tradition" and "the past", two favourite categories transferred to the Croatian festival scene, should not be viewed as petrified and authentic

witnesses of "how our ancestors used to live". They reflect our perception of how we imagine they lived, in most cases how we invent our own "glorious past" based on today's criteria. The process of constantly redefining the most representative way to show a group's distinctiveness is described by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger as "the invention of tradition" (1992). By studying the construction of ceremonial traditions in a diachronic perspective, the authors conclude that numerous practices considered traditional are in fact recent inventions, often deliberately constructed to serve certain ideological ends. These "selective traditions" are chosen out of the totality of cultural inventory and reinterpreted in order to reflect the appropriate narratives (Williams 1965). The creation of identity markers can be connected to the construction of a destination's image. However, it also forms an aspect of a wider cultural and social phenomenon. Such recreations of the past, produced from today's perspective, form an important part of the symbolic construction of a community.

### **WHY DOES IT MATTER TO PEOPLE TO "BE" MEDITERRANEAN?**

This is the question raised by Michael Herzfeld in his analysis of stereotypical permutations of a civilizational ideal known as "the Mediterranean" (2005:51). He finds a vast variety of reasons for which local people invoke the idea of a shared Mediterranean identity: from the argument of local men justifying predation on tourist women as an act attributable to the "hot Mediterranean temperament" to reaching for knowledge of local and regional culture unavailable under the repressive regimes of the past (ibid. 50–59). In Croatia, strategies of self-stereotyping have an additional ideological dimension. This has become evident from the 1990s on, also in the festival industry. On the one hand, a recent increase in the number of festivals practically in all regions of Croatia can be viewed as a global trend. There has been an upsurge of events transposed from their original dates to the tourist season worldwide, a practice frequent in Croatian summer resorts as well. Nowadays, in numerous places along the east Adriatic coast a tourist can participate in summer carnivals, promoted as a peep into "authentic" local traditions although the way they are organized and

performed differs much from their winter counterparts (Škrbić Alempijević 2006). On the other hand, Croatia's political transition from socialism has resulted in a much more multi-layered production of festivals. Since the declaration of independence and the Croatian War of Independence, images of the Croatian state, society and culture have been constructed anew, as an indisputable value. Collective memories cherished during socialism have been tabooed and intentionally "forgotten", especially those connected to WWII and life in socialism. Others have been rethought, recreated and placed in the forefront. What can be observed through various public manifestations, including festivals, is retraditionalization, reaching back to heritage stemming from pre-socialist times (Mišetić 2004). Such retraditionalized public events play an important role in the legitimization of the new political order and system of values (ibid. 103). This process has resulted in the abolishing of events marked by the colours of the fallen regime, in the transformation of existing events (making them more politically correct) and in the restoration of practices suppressed during socialism. Also, many newly established festivals have been introduced. All these strategies were abundantly used in previous constructions of group identities, including in the socialist era as well. However, the choice of traditional and historical motifs has led in the opposite direction. Through their use, the new state has tried to distance itself from past aggressors and the former Yugoslavia, as well as to shed the stigma of "Balkanism", the prevailingly negative image the region has inside Western culture (Todorova 1997). Novel ways of self-identifying and self-stereotyping have been sought for, most of them underlining Croatia's belonging to the Central-European and Mediterranean world for centuries.

The frame of Croatian festivals includes very diverse events, directed towards different groups, but united under the same term. Various motifs have been transformed into core themes of coastal festivals: presentations of folk costumes and customs, popular religiosity, gastronomy, local legends, motifs from chosen historical eras, crafts, different art genres, etc. For our study, we have chosen four different festivals staged along the Croatian coast. These are: the above-mentioned *Festival of Dalmatian "Klapa" Singers in Omiš* (a contest in this vocal tradition); the *Rab Fiesta*, during which a medieval knights' tournament takes place; the *Dubrovnik Summer Festival*, focusing on classical music, folklore performances and the town's

theatre tradition; and the *Split Summer Festival*, with the emphasis on various art forms (drama, opera, ballet, concerts, visual art exhibitions).

We used various sources for our analysis: data provided by festival organizers, published sources (both scientific articles and tourism material), media reports, as well as the results of field research we carried out at the four festival sites.<sup>3</sup>

### EXPRESSING TRADITION IN A SONG: FESTIVAL IN OMIŠ

"Listening to a Dalmatian '*klapa*' I realized that Croatians have a soul that should be shown to the world..." This is how Paulo Coelho commented this musical phenomenon during a meeting with a former Croatian Prime Minister, so establishing it in Croatian public discourse, according to a newspaper report, as heritage recognizable on a global level (Turkalj 2000). The key space in which this "Dalmatian soul" is shown to the world is the Festival in Omiš, which uses Coelho's quotation in its promotional material. This festival is about reaching back to local and regional traditions, a frequent strategy in defining heritage that is distinctive enough to be used as a symbol of identity. The event is mainly described as the prolongation of the traditional Dalmatian way of singing. Still, differences between traditional and festival *klapas* have been dealt with by ethnomusicologists. Traditionally, *klapas* sing in a homophonic style, whereas festival *klapas* sing a great variety of homophonic and polyphonic songs, including pop hits and folk songs from different regions (Čaleta 1997:135).

The Omiš Festival was established in 1967. It is an annual competition and creates a bond between amateur singing and professional directing (ibid. 129). It is not connected to a certain date. Events are dispersed throughout June and July, since there are six separate categories of competition: for male, female and mixed *klapas*; contests for debutants; and performances

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<sup>3</sup> We carried out interviews with citizens of Rab related to the *Fiesta* on several occasions from 2003 to 2005, and participated and observed the Festival in Omiš in 2008 and 2009, the Split Summer Festival in 1998 and the Dubrovnik Summer Festival on several occasions from 1996 to 2007. Nevena Škrbić Alempijević conducted the fieldwork related to festivals in Rab and Omiš, and Rebeka Mesarić Žabčić in Split and Dubrovnik.

of popular and newly composed songs. The Festival started as a contest among male singers, while female groups have participated since 1976. In ethnomusicological discussions, as well in media discourse, the issue of authenticity has been raised when it comes to female and mixed *klapas*. Doubts have often been voiced as to whether female groups can be seen as anchored in the Dalmatian singing tradition without instrumental accompaniment. The same debate has been raised in relation to repertoire: the *klapas* have gradually widened their range from their home region's folk songs to different music styles (ibid. 142).

The Festival attracts special audiences for the Festival's sake – lovers of this type of singing, especially Croatian tourists, come in great numbers on day trips or they stay overnight during the competitions. In this way, *klapas* bring a special status to the town: "When you say Omiš, your first association is the *klapa* Festival, and that is the way it should be", a representative of the local Tourist Board stated in an interview. But it is not all about outside visitors: citizens of Omiš form a significant part of the Festival's audience. Many of them take pride in the event and accept it as a marker of identity. A forty-year-old female citizen of Omiš stated, "During the Festival we feel that we are the centre of Dalmatia, and not only that, the centre of the world! You can see pictures of Omiš on all TV screens, all over the newspapers." There is also a tendency to express the intertwinement of the Festival and the town in a more visual way, prolonging the presence of *klapas* beyond the Festival period. For instance, the Festival organizers and local government have mounted a bronze statue depicting a *klapa* group, the work of sculptor Stanislav Bavčević, at the town's very entrance (Vuković 2007:61). Such initiatives confirm the prominent role the Festival plays as a component in the local politics of memory, seen as a sort of political dynamic through which the authorities try to channel individuals' memories and inaugurate the town's distinctive symbols.

But the Festival reaches far beyond the confines of the town of Omiš. One of the reasons is the organizers' decision to relocate some concerts included in the programme to other Dalmatian destinations, such as Opuzen, the islands of Korčula and Brač, etc. More importantly, nowadays *klapa* singing represents a collective symbol of regional identity (Povrzanović 1989). The Festival's popularity is reflected in the fact that every year since



2000 between 80 and 100 *klapas* from all parts of Croatia have participated in the programme after passing numerous rehearsals and auditions (Grgić 2009:79-101). Inclusion in the Festival has become a motive for the cohesion of other local communities as well. Performances of the local klapa in Omiš has become a main conversation topic and main reason for taking pride in the distinctive local heritage of Dalmatia. Croatian diaspora communities also recognize klapa singing and the Festival in Omiš as important links with the homeland. For members of diaspora communities in Switzerland, Germany, Hungary, Argentina, New Zealand and South Africa who visited the 40<sup>th</sup> Festival in 2006, singing on stage in "the native cradle of the klapa" was the peak of their visit to Croatia. "They were singing and crying, since for many it was a dream come true: to sing in Omiš" (Rora 2007:69).

The Festival adds significantly to the construction of Dalmatian identity. "Being a Dalmatian" is often "proven" by a person's dedication to the klapa and the stereotypical imagery their lyrics invoke: the sun and sea, wine and song, the hard but simple way "our ancestors used to live", handsome and cheerful people, and macho men (Povrzanović 1989:106). This regional belonging is manifested in all layers of the Festival. Klapa groups are mostly dressed in stylized Dalmatian costumes that draw on ornaments, cuts and other basic characteristics from the region's traditional clothes. They mostly perform either traditional Dalmatian songs or newly composed ones whose texts express the beauty of Dalmatia and their affection for it. The names of klapas draw heavily on Dalmatian traditional culture and regional dialects. They bear traces of romanticism and nostalgia – "Nostalgia" is the name of a popular klapa group from Zagreb (ibid. 107-108). "One has to have a pinch of sea salt in one's blood to be a klapa singer, even if your klapa is located in Zagreb", a 25-year-old member of a Dalmatian klapa founded in the country's capital has stated. That salt must have its origins in the "Mare Internum". Numerous arguments have been used by politicians and scholars from the 1990s on to underline the unity of the Mediterranean musical heritage. The very term used to denote the group of singers has also been used to highlight such analogies: the word "klapa" originated in the Trieste region of Northern Italy, meaning simply a "group". When discussing the historic, geographic and social dimension of the concept of the Mediterranean in the musical culture of the Croats, Croatian ethnomusicologist Joško Čaleta concludes:



"There are no music phenomena which exist exclusively as symbols of the Mediterranean. If one were obliged to select a single one of them as being most representative of the Mediterranean as far as Croats are concerned, it would definitely be klapa singing – a coming together of the traditional and the popular with a positive tendency of spreading outside the imagined borders of the Mediterranean" (1999:193).

### **MEETING THE MEDITERRANEAN MEDIEVAL PAST: RAB FIESTA**

Along with the focus on a traditional way of life, Croatian coastal festivals often include references to the medieval past. Since the 1990s, this historical period has become one of the cornerstones of the nation-building process in Croatia. Here, the Middle Ages function as a temporal niche in which national myths, associated with the rise of the early "Croatian kings", i.e. the first rulers of the historic counties forming a part of contemporary Croatia, are placed. Accounts with the infamous socialist past are settled through these symbols. Their value is strengthened through the memory of changes that occurred in the urban toponymy under the past regime. In socialism, place names, streets squares and monuments referring to medieval rulers were replaced with socialist images and were reinstalled after Croatia's independence. Through this process, local, regional and national identities have been redefined in many Croatian places. The profusion of historical narratives, cultural practices and products referring to some idealized past (including modern games) cannot be seen as an exclusive characteristic of Croatia. On the contrary, the Middle Ages in the postmodern imagination can be viewed as the "World of our own Timeless and Heroic Past" and observed as a global tendency (comp. Hjemdahl 2002). However, few organizers take this broad framework as their starting point in presenting their festivals. In their narratives, festivals feature as unique elements of local culture. Such is the case with the Rab *Fiesta*. It is described as a form of resistance to "globalization that has already caused damage to the Croatian language and culture. The Rab *Fiesta* – Medieval Festival, with its ancient crafts and tasty organic food, brings to life the concept of identity as a key issue in Europe today" (Tenžera 2007). In our

opinion, drawing analogies between the Festival in Rab and other events claiming similar historical heritage to be their distinctive feature in a wider European context is not crucial in understanding the event if we focus on the perspective of the Festival's protagonists. This Festival, founded in 2002, mobilizes different levels of identity construction among its organizers, performers and audience.

July 27<sup>th</sup>, the day of St. Christopher, the patron saint of the island town of Rab, is the climax of the so-called Medieval Summer Festival in Rab. The aim of the Festival, according to its official web page, is to add a medieval spirit to the town's materiality:

"...to revive and present customs, crafts, the way of life and spirit of the island Middle Ages. The *Fiesta* takes place on an open scene – in the streets of the town's oldest part – Kaldanca ... Ancient stories are played out in front of numerous inquisitive minds, coins are forged, baskets are woven, the stone and wood products are crafted; sculptors, painters, pastry cooks and florists exhibit their skill on the piazza, whereas a medieval household is situated in the gallery: women weave, the flour is grinded, the bread is prepared."<sup>4</sup>

The peak of the festival is the medieval crossbow contest, accompanied by corresponding visual iconography in an attempt to re-imagine Mediterranean medieval modes of dress. A careful choice of music (a mix of drums, fanfares and klapas) salutes the contestants as they march through the town bearing specially crafted weapons. The Festival has its beginnings in 1995, when a group of Rab citizens, later in coordination with the tourist board and local authorities, founded an association of Rab crossbowers (Bukovčan and Potkonjak 2006:53). The Festival's organisation and events – contests and tournament – greatly resemble similar events that take place in Montegiardino in San Marino. The Rab archers describe the "perfect sense" these bonds make in terms of a local myth. St. Marino, the founder of the Republic, allegedly originated from this Croatian island. Also, creating analogies on the other side of the Adriatic is a way of proving the town's belonging to the Mediterranean and a Western cultural sphere. However, these parallels can be explained

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<sup>4</sup> *sic*, <http://www.kristofor.hr/hr-vitez.html>, accessed 19.02.2010.

without reaching back to the dawn of San Marino's history. Representatives of the Montegiardino Association participated in the reconstruction of the crossbowers' inventory on Rab. This is an issue critics often raise who emphasize the Festival's inauthenticity, discharging it as an import from abroad. Another frequent criticism is related to the distortion of historical facts in the narratives aiming to root crossbows in the island's history. The Rab Association claims it has revitalized an ancient tradition of knightly tournaments dating back to 1075. That year is mentioned in a legend as the year in which St. Christopher saved the town of Rab from Norman invasion by changing the direction of the enemy's arrows. In public discourse a sense of ceaseless continuity has been created, bridging the temporal gap between the town's medieval days and today's festival scene. For example, newspaper article claims the following:

"In the year of 1364 the Grand Council of the Town of Rab established two days as the local feasts – May 9<sup>th</sup>, Dies Victoriae, when Rab was freed from Normans by St. Christopher in 1075 and July 27<sup>th</sup>, Dies Natalis, the day of the martyr's death of St. Christopher. (...) The popular festivities lasted for several days and the town gate was open to everybody. And now, six centuries later, the popular feast lasts for three days... and offers an unforgettable encounter with the ancient scents, tastes and crafts" (Tenžera 2007).

There is no doubt that the historical data used to legitimize the town's medieval heritage is highly disputable, and is drawn more from local myths than from scientific historiography. Still, Rab's urban structure and architecture offer a wide choice of symbols for the reconstruction of a medieval identity. Out of four church bells, the town's landmarks featured on all marketing materials, three were erected in the Romanesque period. "The Festival is giving new life to the urban space, and they both reach back to medieval traditions, although in different ways", a representative of the Rab Tourist Board stated.

The Association of Crossbowers is contributing to promote a local identity framed within a national and Mediterranean heritage narrative far beyond the island context. For instance, the Bavarian and Croatian prime ministers, accompanied by a troop of Rab archers, opened the Tourism Fair in Munich in February 2007 (Prodan 2007). Contemporary performances

connected to the festival form a new platform serving the cohesion of the community. Numerous citizens of Rab view medieval motifs as heritage through which their rich history is honoured and shown to outside viewers. They promote it as a "view into their past", an insight into their "true identity and real roots" (Biti and Blagaić 2009:94). Their interest is not only financial; they also find it important to "exhibit the uniqueness of our town, showing there is something more to find here, apart from sand and clear sea", as a fifty-year-old olive-oil producer explained.

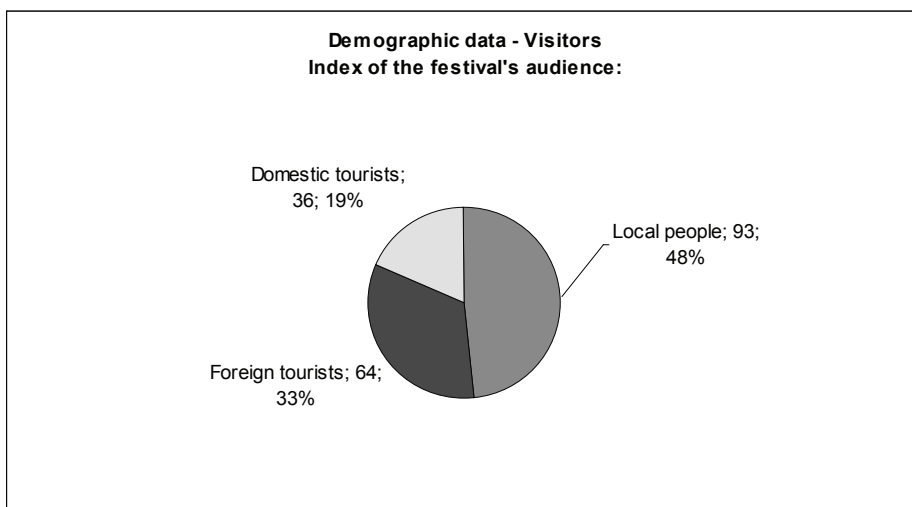
### **THE DUBROVNIK SUMMER FESTIVAL AND ITS AMBIENCE**

The historical reenactments and staging of "ancient traditions", as shown in the previous examples, are not the sole programmes that acquire the attributes of valuable heritage and distinctive symbols of identity on the festival stage. This tendency can also be observed in the frame of those festivals branding themselves through creativity and innovation, rather than looking back to the town's past. This is certainly the case of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival. Its organizers explain the event's symbolic potential in terms of the intertwining of tradition and contemporary cultural creation, adjusted to today's circumstances and audiences. Historical episodes and spaces representing the peak of Dubrovnik's power and influence provide settings in which many novel and modern narratives about the city have been created through the Festival. As stated by the Festival organizers, it is the combination of Dubrovnik's Renaissance and Baroque atmosphere and the contemporary artistic expression that brings the city's cosmopolitan spirit to life. Such identity policy is reflected in the Festival's promotional material in the following way:

"The beginnings of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival coincide with the intensive trend of organizing summer festivals throughout Europe, which was searching for a new identity after the traumas of World War II. However, the actual reasons for founding the Dubrovnik Summer Festival are deeply rooted in the energy of the lasting cultural heritage of Dubrovnik, which had been searching for a suitable form of its contemporary creative expression for a long time" (Prlander 2007:9).

The Dubrovnik Summer Festival was founded in 1950. Every year, it gets underway on July 10 and lasts for 45 days. Its focus is on theatre, drama, music and dance performances, as well as on occasional folklore displays. It tends to feature the most prominent names and ensembles of the national, but also European artistic scene. One of the Festival's goals, as the organizers have clarified, is to provide an additional cultural attraction and to bring life to the fascinating materiality of Dubrovnik, to present the city's rich tangible and intangible culture through a festival form. The Festival organization and management is, therefore, firmly anchored in the city's cultural tourism strategy. However, the Festival cannot be viewed only as a tourist attraction. Local people also describe the Dubrovnik Summer Festival as the «soul of the city» in the summer period. This becomes clear when one analyzes a demographic survey obtained from the festival organizers. It is based on a sample of 195 people and indicates that local inhabitants still form the majority of the festival audience.

The Festival obviously communicates important messages to the citizens of Dubrovnik who state that the cultural values of the city, and



*Table 1. Index of Dubrovnik Summer Festival's audience;  
survey done by the Festival organizers in 2007. /*

*Tablica 1. Indeksi publike Dubrovačkog ljetnog festivala;  
anketu proveli organizatori festivala 2007. godine.*

therefore the city itself and the people in it, matter. This is not surprising, since from its very beginning the Festival was conceptualized as a materialization of the uniqueness of the place and a reflection of the politics of local identity. The symbols of the Festival and the city overlap to a great extent. The festival flag, with the symbol of *Libertas* – Liberty, also draws on motifs from the Renaissance-era independent Republic of Dubrovnik. When it comes to the Festival programme, this is strongly linked to the city's rich cultural, primarily theatrical, traditions: the works of Marin Držić, Nikola Nalješković, Ivan Gundulić and Ivo Vojnović have become a mainstay of the theatre programme since the early 1950s (Prlender 2007:10). However, the Festival is not designed only as a stage on which the city's symbolic inventory is presented: it has become a relevant symbol of Dubrovnik itself. A reason why the Festival is inseparable from its local determinants lies in its treatment of space. Since its foundation, the Festival has grasped the concept of the "ambient theatre". The physical and symbolic intertwining of the Festival and the city is very noticeable: palaces, towers, but also numerous open-air venues, squares, parks of Dubrovnik and the nearby islands are used as festival stages. Places filled with meaning for the inhabitants of Dubrovnik and which are simultaneously sites of their everyday lives become major determinants of the theatre and music programmes presented during the Festival. Organizers often pose the question whether a certain performative form would be adequate for a certain space and whether it would harmonize with the local imagery connected to it.

Other levels of identity are also expressed through the Festival. In public discourse, the Festival sometimes serves as an argument to boost Croatia's desired position in the European Union. At the opening of the Dubrovnik Summer Festival in 2007, the mayor presented the town as "a unique LEGO piece without which the edifice of a new, joint Europe cannot be complete" (Hauswitschka 2007).

In order to underline the city's special character, the Festival organizers use imagery unlimited by the frontiers of Dubrovnik and its surroundings. Their reach often extends to the sea, evoking the city's rich maritime tradition as a source of its historical status and power and, at the same time, building new dynamic connections with lands on other Mediterranean coasts. Through the Festival, the city becomes a stage open to the sun, the stars and the sea, as claimed by the festival organizers. In

their narratives, the Festival becomes one with the city, owing its openness and cultural belonging to the Mediterranean world:

"The city with one face and numberless mirrors in which it reflects and multiplies itself. Dubrovnik is a city of wonders. It was born on the coasts of the cradle of humankind. Like Aphrodite, it emerged from the rock, out of the same sea... The Mediterranean connects it with other continents, civilizations and peoples. The incomparable Dubrovnik."<sup>5</sup>

### **THE SPLIT SUMMER FESTIVAL: "CONFIRMING OUR BELONGING TO THE MEDITERRANEAN CULTURAL TRADITION"**

The Split Summer Festival was founded in 1954. Its early programme mostly encompassed classical artistic genres, such as opera, drama, ballet and concerts of classical music, whereas it has gradually expanded to include contemporary music and klapa concerts, films, various exhibitions, street theatre performances, etc. The Croatian National Theatre of Split, one of the Festival's main organizing institutions, has staged most performances, but the Festival has also included productions by renowned national and European troops. The Festival usually runs for a month, starting in July and finishing in August. Comparisons are often made with the Dubrovnik Summer Festival, especially when it comes to the process of turning the city, as well as its surroundings, into a festival stage. Spaces that evoke the city's ancient grandeur, such as the cellars of Diocletian's palace, the Peristil (the main palace square), the fortress of Gripe and Sustipan, the remains of a Roman basilica and the Benedictine monastery of St. Stephen, are used as backgrounds for contemporary, but thematically related, performances. The Festival extends its frame beyond the city itself, by turning the architectural heritage of Split-Dalmatia County, such as the archaeological site of Salona and the UNESCO-protected town core of Trogir, into festival stages.

Identity is one of the keywords used to attract audiences both nationally and globally: the slogan "The Inseparability of Identity and

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dubrovnik-festival.hr/Default.aspx?art=66&sec=45>, accessed 25.02.2010.



Human Dignity" is nowadays used to promote the Festival's distinctiveness. In such rhetoric, the Festival deliberately avoids the attributes of "pure fun" or "triviality". Something more solemn and serious, the organizers state, is at the heart of the transformation of the city through the Festival. The identity they seek to confirm is based on the city's historical heritage, the history of its spontaneous theatricality. While these identity strategies are oriented towards the local community, descriptions of the local way of life and of the inhabitants of Split themselves feature as an attraction for outside visitors:

"Citizens of Split, proud of their rich heritage..., famous for their lively and youthful spirit and a certain Mediterranean and specifically Croatian human warmth characteristic only for Split, make an open and sociable milieu aware of its own identity and of the cultural diversity that has always enhanced and enriched Split."<sup>6</sup>

References to Mediterranean imagery are much more direct in the marketing of this tourism destination than in the cases of the three aforementioned festivals. In the organizers' discourse, the programme is presented as "proper to a typical Mediterranean community that has carried theatre as a natural heritage for centuries in its blood, nerves, memory and spirit" (ibid.) The festival's "Mediterraneanness" is also postulated as one of its main properties in political rhetoric. When in 2009 Božo Biškupić, the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, described the Split Summer Festival as Croatian cultural capital that should be protected and cherished as an original brand and symbol of the city, he referred to the Mediterranean as one of its prominent aspects:

"Through its tradition, the Split Summer Festival bears witness to the extraordinary cultural setting from which it has emerged, as well as to a recognizably Mediterranean spirit that is natural in this area and over the past period has been largely nurtured through the very drama and music performances shown on the festival stages."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Author's translation; <http://www.splitsko-ljeto.hr/55.-Splitsko-ljeto/55.-splitsko-ljeto>, accessed 26. 2. 2010.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.min-kulture.hr/default.aspx?ID=5023>, accessed 26.02.2010.

The most explicit moment in the production of "the Mediterranean" in the frame of the Split Summer Festival occurred in 2007. The entire theme of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Festival was dedicated to the Mediterranean and was presented under the slogan: "The Mediterranean as a place where craving, which becomes love, is expressed without restraint". As explained by the organizers, the goal of the Festival was to revive ancient Mediterranean motifs and popular expressions in a contemporary context, to again raise some universal questions tackled by Mediterranean scholars over the centuries and to prove the festival "to be a guarantee of our contribution to European culture and our own national cultural identity".<sup>8</sup>

## CONCLUSION

At first glance, it may seem that there are few similarities between these events. The lifestyles embedded in the frame of these festivals vary significantly in the four towns, partly due to great differences in their size: Split has 175,140 inhabitants, Dubrovnik 30,436, Omiš 15,109 and Rab 9,480, according to a survey carried out in 2001 (Croatian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Very different cultural practices are put on stage at these festivals, from displays of traditional culture, over expressions of popular religiosity and revivals of medieval heritage, to contemporary genres such as film, modern drama and music, modern art exhibitions, and so on. The treatment of space is yet another category that distinguishes each of these festivals: some tend to turn the whole town into a festival stage (as is the case in Rab), some reserve the most representative public spaces for performances (like in Dubrovnik), whereas others use more conventional theatre forms.

Still, some striking overlaps enable us to establish common denominators when it comes to the contemporary usage of traditional forms and the relationship of heritage and tourism. All the festivals are organized during the summer, some of them taking place on a fixed date, for example connected to festivities on a patron saint's day, some taking place on newly established dates reserved for the festival, and some shifting dates from

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<sup>8</sup> <http://arhiva-splitskoljeto.hnk-split.hr/index53.htm>, accessed 30.03.2009.

one year to another. All of them celebrate the continuity of the urban way of life in these towns. All of them tend to position Croatian heritage in a wider Mediterranean and European context. Finally, although new media, design concepts and performances are included in the programmes, all four festivals encompass specific references to the past, evoking the towns' "glorious" histories. These reinterpretations of the past for present-day usage are of primary interest in this work. The past offered to viewers on the contemporary festival stage should not be approached as an insight into objective and fixed facts of what actually happened in the community's history. We prefer to see such performances as expressions of collective memory. We understand collective memory as subjective, fragmentary and idealized images of the past not necessarily based in historical reality, but in narratives of the past we would like to claim for ourselves as a group.

All four festivals we studied can be seen as presentations of symbols depicted as "right" and "ours" in a particular social, economic and political moment. Our research has shown that festivals should not be considered only as spaces that temporarily contain heritage, but that they can be viewed as heritage themselves. This is in accordance with the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which describes performing arts and festive events as practices, representations and cultural spaces recognized as part of a community's cultural heritage by the communities carrying them out (UNESCO 2003). In short, we consider festivals to be arenas in which cultural identities are built and reasserted.

The issue often raised is whether heritage presented on the festival stage is "authentic" or "fake". Cultural experts often tend to discard certain festivals as less valuable based on the historical credibility of the heritage presented there. We believe another approach could be more efficient in discussing the significance of festivals as domains in which intangible cultural heritage is manifested. We, as cultural anthropologists, are more interested in understanding festivals from the insiders' point of view. If we take this perspective as our starting point, the authenticity of the past understood as correspondence to detailed historical facts is no longer crucial. What matters more is that the community considers that heritage to be genuine and its own. In this sense, narratives enacted on the festival stage, even when they divert from historical exactness, can play a major role in constructing and expressing the distinct identities of communities.

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#### HRVATSKI PRIOBALNI FESTIVALI I KONSTRUIRANJE SREDOZEMLJA

Članak je usmjeren na festivale koje promatra kao arenu unutar koje se kulturni identiteti stvaraju i ponovno uspostavljaju. Referiranje na tradiciju i prošlost imaju u tom procesu ključnu ulogu. Autorice analiziraju četiri tematski različita festivala koja se odvijaju duž Jadranske obale: Festival dalmatinskih klapa u Omišu, Rapsku Fiestu, Dubrovački ljetni festival i Splitski ljetni festival. Festivali se promatraju kao načini ponovnog otkrivanja i postavljanja mediteranskog imaginarija na pozornicu.

**Ključne riječi:** Sredozemlje, festivali, Festival dalmatinskih klapa u Omišu, Rapska fjera, Dubrovačke ljetne igre, Splitsko ljeto

